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ABSTRACT

The idea of a continuing association of principals assisting principals brought about the formation of the Learning Environments Consortium, discussed in this paper. The principals involved in this association, the paper notes, are committed to developing student-centered programs. They work together in such activities as school site visits, common summer workshops, and the sharing of ideas and educational materials. Four priorities of the consortium are listed and discussed in detail: (1) to use learning guides to develop a continuous program; (2) to use a teacher-advisor to monitor academic programs; (3) to give principals inservice training in instructional leadership; and (4) to improve communications in the school and the community. (Author/LD)

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SCHOOL MANAGEMENT: PRINCIPALS ASSISTING PRINCIPALS

A Presentation to the

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School Management: Principals Assisting Principals

Robert E. Lowery

The idea of a continuing relationship of principals assisting principals brought about the formation of the Learning Environments Consortium. The structuring of a model which would serve the needs of an educational community became our goal in 1974. Our basic growth development was a product of our involvement in the NASSP Model Schools Project from 1969 through 1974.

During the past ten years we have made a commitment to each other -- to combine our energies towards developing programs which would provide a student centered approach to education.

The initial step to this action has been the development of a strong supervisory management team in each school. A basic responsibility of the principalship was to become knowledgeable in the areas of curriculum design, learning theory, communications and human behavior.

For the programs to become operationalized in each school the acceptance of a change in management philosophy was required. Built upon a climate of trust resulting from shared decision making, our ultimate goal is to place educational decisions as close to the learner as possible.

The experiences and expertise of member principals in the Consortium are, and have been quite varied. The one common link that served as a base was commitment to an ideal. The variety of backgrounds provided different approaches to solving similar problems and, subsequently, the opportunity of learning from one another.

As members of the Consortium, it became our role to visit each of the schools and critique the various programs.

Meeting with teachers brought about an awareness of their goals, successes and frustrations. Then as a collective group we would work together to question, challenge, and stimulate the individual school efforts.

As a group of principals and educational leaders we assist each other in being made aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individual school programs. This aspect of our Consortium was performed in an atmosphere of mutual friendship and respect. The goal was one of assisting each person to grow as a competent administrator, as well as assisting teachers in their educational endeavors with students.

In attempting to bring about meaningful change and progress, it became apparent that the teachers from the Consortium schools should be provided the opportunity of visiting member schools. This made it possible for them to gain new insights and compare notes with their colleagues. With the support of the school districts and the commitment on the part of the teachers, it became possible to provide summer workshops to concentrate on special concerns or problems. During the past four years it has been possible for us to provide our own inservice programs dealing with such concepts as the "Teacher Advisor Role;" "Continuous Progress;" "Breaking the Pencil and Paper Curriculum," and during this past year "Student Learning Styles."

It has become our goal for the current school year to provide inservice assistance to each of the schools. The decision as to the topic of the inservice program is left to the discretion of each school, with assistance offered by the Consortium directors and member principals. If possible, teachers from the various schools may also be involved as specialists or consultants.

With principals serving in the role of middle management, it is also a prerequisite to have support from the superintendent and school board in order to reach the selected goals. The concept of having everyone on the team brought about the involvement of superintendents and school board members supporting the idea of principals assisting principals.

To enhance this relationship, a yearly meeting is sponsored by one of the member districts whereby the principals, superintendents and school board members gather to observe the educational programs under development. Principals assist principals through the interaction of dialogue about the common goals with senior administrators from other school districts. This also provides the opportunity for superintendents and board members to compare and discuss mutual concerns at their level of operation.

In attempting to meet the needs of the individual schools and the Consortium in general, we have analyzed our needs and ranked our major goals. Our priorities consisted of working together on the following concepts:

1. Learning Guides
2. Teacher Advisor Role
3. Principal as Instructional Leader
4. School Communication Network
5. Community Communication Network

The concept of "Learning Guides" at least for the present time, is a requirement in developing and instituting a continuous progress program. The design, content, and the use of these guides were shared among the faculty of the various schools.

From their combined efforts and talents an improved vehicle for presenting data was devised. Through the combined efforts of teachers and administrators we have made significant strides in developing non-print learning activities. Within the Consortium, a concentrated effort is being directed toward the developing of a computer bank of learning objectives and test items. While these aspects of our program are in place and functioning, we continue to explore ways of improving our delivery systems.

The concept of the teacher advisor role is significant in each school, although the mode of operation may be varied to fit the local situation. The advisor is responsible for monitoring the academic programs of each advisee. This role is correlated with the role of the teacher as a subject facilitator. This aspect of the program involves the principal in working with faculty relative to teacher-student concerns and teacher-curriculum situations.

To fulfill the role as an instructional leader we felt the need for specialized preparation and self-improvement, relative to curriculum development and learning theories. Some avenues used to gain these competencies were through the use of mini-residencies in instructional leadership. This was made possible by an administrator spending a week in one of the Consortium schools studying the administrative techniques used in a specific educational setting. Other ways were through involvement in LEC sponsored institutes and summer workshops.

As a group of LEC educators we have set up a profile of what skills and competencies principals should attain if they are to serve as "instructional leaders."

These would include:

1. Formal training in an appropriate level of curriculum;
2. Adequate preparation for instructional leadership through school-based experiences;
3. Training in group process skills;
4. Commitment to the participative management approach;
5. Boldness and risk orientation;
6. Supportive and cooperative temperment;
7. Effective oral communications;
8. Decision making skills;
9. Commitment to evaluation;
10. Evidence of initiative in self-improvement.

The fourth priority was that of improving the school communication network. It was felt that about every two years there may be a need to evaluate the school climate/communication profile. In order for the LEC model to function effectively there has to be open communication among all areas. This would include the subject departments, the professional counselors, the supervisory management team and the teachers.

To assess this aspect of the Consortium schools, each school participated in doctoral studies related to school climate and communication. We felt the need to focus on organizational dynamics and climate as a major factor in the change process. This is a priority if we are to identify the climate or atmosphere that is most conducive to providing the optimum types of educational experiences for students.

Another of our goals is to develop programs which put the affective and cognitive areas on a more equal basis, and

emphasize "family oriented learning." This would involve efforts to bring the community in general and the family in particular into the educational program.

Another major priority was that of improving a community communication network. This involves working with the immediate neighborhood parent-teacher associations, school advisory groups, student groups, etc. At times there may be a need to develop intervention strategies so as to cope with reaction to change and the cyclic nature of change. As individuals and as a group of Consortium principals, we have met with parents and school advisory councils to discuss the programs being implemented into the schools and the long range goals of our concerted efforts.

In working together during the past several years we have accomplished a great deal -- but we continually challenge ourselves to stretch our imagination and seek ways to improve our educational programs. In order to put into practice the model we envision we must: (1) be able to diagnose and prescribe for an entire school in much the same way we now diagnose and prescribe for individual students; (2) be able to assess the climate of a school and prescribe the procedures that would serve best to be used in changing that climate to one that is "caring;" (3) be able to identify the organizational features that will work for and against change; and (4) be flexible and understanding of the fact that there are alternative answers to most problems.

The schools operating under the LEC model all operate on a philosophical foundation of personalized education and have the same goals, although the achievement of our goals and the operational structures implemented vary in each school.

To improve the educational scene in these six school districts we will further assist each other by studying the factors that have brought about the differences in schools with similar philosophies and identical goals.

The questions we must answer include:

1. What part does financial support play in the differences in goal achievement and operational structure?
2. Is the socio-economic level of the community a factor in goal achievement?
3. How important is district office and school board support?
4. Are there common factors in the training and background of faculty that influence goal achievements and operational structure?
5. What role does administrative leadership style play in goal achievement?
6. What roles do learning styles and teaching styles play in operational structure, and in goal achievement?

I believe that the major factor which has contributed to our success story, as limited as it may be, is our challenge to educational problems as a collection of committed administrators. The opportunity for future successes remains positive and bright as long as we can do so on a broad front -- with understanding and support on a collegial basis. With positive and collective guidance, each school can become the ideal school where students, teachers, staff, and everyone involved can become a "teaching" person.